

## Remembering George Neal

Canada's aviation community has lost one of its outstanding members. On April 4, 2016, George Arthur Neal died at the age of 97 at his home in North York, Ontario where he was born and lived all his life, except during his RCAF service. Less than a year ago George entered the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the oldest active licensed pilot in the world.

Born on November 21, 1918, George is survived by his sisters Evelyn LoPatriello and Doris Mundinger. "We have lost a pioneer in Canadian aviation," said Tom Appleton, Chairman of Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame. "On behalf of the Hall, we extend our most sincere condolences to George Neal's family and friends."

George was the winner in 1989 of Canada's most prestigious aviation award, the Trans-Canada (McKee) Trophy, and inducted as a member of Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame in 1995. He was a valued and long-term member of the Canadian Aviation Historical Society (CAHS) and also the CAHS Toronto Chapter. George was a proud member of the "Beaver Pilots Panel" which was part of a symposium held on May 27, 2007 to honour the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the de Havilland DHC-2 Beaver. The symposium, itself, was organized in conjunction with the 2007 Annual General Meeting and Convention of the CAHS.

George learned to fly at the Toronto Flying Club in 1935 and earned his Private Pilot's License in 1936. From 1937 to 1941 he was employed at de Havilland Aircraft of Canada (DHC). In 1941 he enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force and was posted to No. 10 Air Observers School in Chatham, New Brunswick, where he became a Flight Commander, Chief Test Pilot and Assistant Maintenance Superintendent. In 1946 he rejoined DHC where he would be employed for the next 37 years. His first job was in the engine shop, and in 1947 he was transferred to the flying staff as a full time pilot and took over the development testing of the new DHC-1 Chipmunk trainer.

He became Chief Test Pilot in 1948 and, with the introduction of the British de Havilland Vampire Jet into service in the RCAF, George became one of the first civilian pilots in Canada to become jet qualified. He did a considerable amount of demonstrating and development testing of this aircraft. The flight testing of the DHC-2 Beaver, first flown by Russ Bannock, was completed by George in 1948. Testing included the full certification program to obtain Transport Canada Type Approval, plus the demonstration of the short

takeoff and landing abilities of the Beaver which led to worldwide sales. Next was to be tested was the DHC-3 Otter which George first took to the skies on December 12, 1951 followed by two years of testing for certification as a land plane and float and ski-plane versions.

The next aircraft to be tested was the prototype DHC-4 Caribou. George's life almost ended George's life on February 14, 1959 when part of the tail on the first Caribou, destined for the U.S. Army, was lost during high speed trials and the aircraft became unmanageable. George and the accompanying Department of Transport pilot were forced to bail out of the aircraft. However, George's excellent attention to detail prevented a fire following the crash and enabled a study which led to the cause of the accident.

In 1999, George was commemorated by the Royal Canadian Mint, with a \$20.00 coin with his profile and the DHC-6 Twin Otter on the reverse and the Queen on the obverse. George continued flying after leaving de Havilland and in 2015 he flew his personal DHC-1 Chipmunk from Brampton Airport to Toronto Pearson International Airport to display it at the 43<sup>rd</sup>. annual induction ceremonies of Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame. This flight was recorded by Guinness World Records which recognized him to be the world's oldest active licensed pilot at 96 years, 194 days as of June 2, 2015.